

Here we stand, Worlds apart. by DigitalMeowMix

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: 80's Music, 80's Pop Culture, Bonding, Flashbacks, Friendship, Gen, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Memories, The Upside Down

Language: English

Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven (Stranger Things), Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven & Dustin Henderson, Eleven & Lucas Sinclair, Eleven & Mike Wheeler, Eleven & Will Byers, Eleven (Stranger Things) & Everyone

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-12-17

Updated: 2016-12-17

Packaged: 2022-04-02 00:16:54

Rating: General Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 4,019

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Eleven in the upside down, journeying to get back to her new family.

Here we stand, Worlds apart.

Author's Note:

- For [havisham](#).

Thanks to my wonderful beta!

When she wakes up, everything is dark.

She fumbles around where she's lying and her hands find cloth, although it's wet and slimy. It's so dark that it takes a moment for her to see clearly. It's a blanket propped up all around her, it smells musty but familiar.

Suddenly, she recognizes it - her fort hiding place at Mike's house. She sits up suddenly as she thinks of Mike and she tries to shout for him but she coughs instead; her throat hurts, and then she remembers screaming as she fought the monster. She pulls herself up and out of the fort even though her whole body feels sore and sees that she's still wearing the dress Mike gave her, but it's just so dirty.

She felt a burning in her chest - Mike's sister would be so angry. But then she remembers meeting Nancy, her pretty hair and the way she hugged Mike and she thinks, no, she's nice, she won't be angry. She wonders if Nancy would still be her sister if Mike wasn't her brother. She looks around and everything is black, the only thing she sees is the fort behind her, Mike's isn't there. She starts walking. She has to find him.

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She doesn't know how long she's been walking when the scenery around her changes and it's not like the bath anymore. There are buildings and cars but no people. It's better than the bath, where there was only her and the monster, but everything is dirty and dark. Plants are all over the ground and everything else, too, but not pretty plants like the bright flowers in front of Mike's house. These plants are green and brown and black and look like they have sharp leaves. There is mist everywhere and little particles of what looks like

dust float through the air. It's cold here and the air smells stale. She calls for Mike over and over, until her throat hurts even worse, but there is no answer. She is alone here.

She remembers her room at the center. She would sit in her room alone until papa or the scientists came for her at test time. The scientists asked her questions, but they didn't say hello when they came into her room, they didn't ask if she had dreamed the night before. The guards silently transported her from her room to the lab and back again. She thinks papa told them not to talk to her, but she never knew why. In her room, she had a bed and blanket and her lion. There were no colors and no windows but she didn't care. Sometimes the scientists gave her crayons to draw and then they went away again. She did not mind being alone then, but she doesn't want to be alone now, she wants to ask Mike about school and hear Dustin describe the comic book he was reading, she wants Lucas to complain about his math homework. She wishes they were here with her, to tell her it's OK. But they're safe; she just needs to find them.

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She waited every afternoon for Mike and the other boys to return from school. She played with the puzzles and board games on the shelves in the basement. She was careful sneaking upstairs to use the shiny bathroom with deep blue wallpaper and lots of nicely scented things in the cabinets. She sometimes napped in a sunbeam that came in from the small basement window right in front of her fort. She tried to be patient but sometimes it was hard. She missed Mike and Dustin and even Lucas.

One afternoon, she heard the basement door open as she was reading a book in her fort and then Mike's footsteps. She knew it was him because he was singing a little under his breath:

"I love rock n roll
I love rock 'n' roll
So put another dime
In the jukebox
Baby"

He stopped when he got to the bottom of the stairs and smiled at her

- his smile was really big.

"Hey, El, the guys will be over in a while, they had stuff to do after school."

She didn't mind, she like to be with just Mike.

"What were you singing," she asked.

He stared at her for a moment and she wondered if she had done something wrong. He still stared at her sometimes when she didn't know things he and the other boys did.

He smiled again, really big. "I'll be right back," he said, already halfway up the basement steps. He returned minutes later holding a machine.

"You'll love this," he said. He took a tape from behind his back. He put it in and pushed a button. Staticky music came out of the device; after she listened for a moment she knew it was the same song he'd been singing. Mike started to nod his head to the music, so she did it too.

"This is Joan Jett," he said, a little loudly so she could hear him over the music. "She's a singer, she's really cool. She has short hair and she's bad-ass just like you." His cheeks turned red.

She liked the idea of a girl having short hair and singing a song that Mike likes, so she said, "I like it," and Mike smiled really big, and she smiled too. They listened to the song a few more times. By the last time, he was singing along and jumping around the basement dancing, and she joined him. He even showed her how to play air guitar.

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It's so quiet here, like the bathtub. But here it's not all black, just dark.

She remembers when she started going in the bathtub the scientists taught her how to meditate, they said it would help her see, that it would keep her from being scared in the dark. The scientists played a

tape of a women talking in a low calm voice - her voice sounded fancy, like from another country. The woman told her to clear her mind by concentrating on a certain word, like peace or focus. The lady on the tape said to repeat the word in her head, to picture it in her mind. She is so bored of the silence now that she tries to meditate to clear her head, but all she can think of is Mike and the boys, and that doesn't clear her head, it makes her head full of noise and sadness and it makes her head hurt like when she uses her powers.

She tries to think of a word to focus on but the only words the come are monster, lost, scared. She tries to think of something happy - she read a story at Mike's house that said you have to think happy thoughts for things to happen. She thinks of Mike's smile when he came home from school and saw her waiting in the basement and thinks of all the days they spent together. It's not a word, but it might still work. She's humming the tune before even remembers the words that go along with it.

"I love rock and roll... So put another dime in the juice box baby..."

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Mike said they couldn't all hang out with her after school.

"Mr. Clarke will get suspicious if all of us keep skipping AV club at once," he explained.

They argued over a schedule until finally, Dustin had volunteered to 'babysit' her first. She wanted to say she wasn't a baby but she liked Dustin, he was funny and called her their friend. When Dustin came over the next afternoon, she was drawing with crayons and colored markers at the table where the boys played their game. She was drawing herself, only different. She was wearing the dress Mike had given her, the one he said she looked really pretty in. She heard the basement door close and Dustin called down, "Hey, El, you down here?"

"Yes," she called back up. She was trying to focus on her drawing. Suddenly, a big plastic bag was plopped down on the table she was drawing at. The bag pushed a yellow crayon off the side of the table.

Dustin said, "I brought stuff for you, something tasty." He said it like it was secret but his voice got high like he was excited.

Her eyes got big. "Eggos?" she asked.

"Nah, man, even better."

She wondered how anything could be as good as Eggos, but then he dumped the bag out on the table with a loud "Ta da". There were lots of things in little colored wrappers.

"I went to the store after school and I got a crap load of candy. I didn't know what kind you liked so I just got every type they had," he explained. "So, what kind do you want?"

She didn't know - there were so many choices, had she had candy before? She didn't think papa had ever given her candy. "I don't know," she said. Should she know what kind of candy she liked, was it bad if she didn't?

Dustin just smiled really wide. "Then we'll just have to try everything to be to be sure!" he said, gesturing to the giant pile.

An hour later, her tummy hurt, but she had decided she disliked pixie sticks because they made her mouth hurt, but she loved big league chew - Dustin teaches her to blow bubbles - and Clarke's bars. She laid on Mike's basement floor next to Dustin who was breathing funny and moaning that he was gonna puke. She was worried for a moment - sometimes after procedures at the center she threw up a lot and she hated it. He didn't seem to be in danger otherwise, though. After Dustin did run upstairs to puke, he laid down again next to her and groaned like he just ran really fast for a long time.

"Made it just in time," he giggled. She laughed too. He started to throw the candy wrappers surrounding them all over the place.

"Confetti!" he shouted, as he heaved the wrappers over his head so they fell around him like rain. She started doing it, too. They made a mess and ended up falling asleep there. When Mike and Lucas came back from school and found them, they complained that they didn't leave any candy for them.

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She's not hungry. She's not thirsty. She's been walking for a long time but her stomach isn't growling and her throat isn't dry. Is it because she's in the upside down? Do you not need food and water here? Is that how Will survived? She doesn't feel hungry but she still wants to eat. She's never felt that way before, wanting to eat because she can, because it tastes good.

When she lived with papa, she got rice and apple and a cup of milk for dinner. When she was extra good at her tests, she got chocolate milk. She only got chocolate milk a few times. Now she wants Eggos, mashed potatoes, beans, apple juice. Chocolate like the kind she ate with Dustin, all those colorful wrappers filled with sticky sweetness.

Mike gave her so many good things to eat. He thought it was funny when she would eat the vegetables left over from his dinner. He laughed the first time she ate peas. He said, "You really are special, you even eat your greens, my mom is gonna love you."

She liked that, she wanted Mike's mom to like her, she wanted to stay with him and his family and eat dinner with them every night. The thought makes her her happy and she tries to focus on walking faster, the faster she gets out of here the faster she can have Eggos with Mike and the boys.

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It was Lucas's turn to stay with her after school and she was nervous.

Lucas hadn't liked her for so long, and even if he said he was sorry for being a mouth-breather before, she didn't know if they were friends yet. The other boys thought her abilities are neat, they said it all the time. "El, that's so awesome, how you can make my action figures move with your mind," "El, you should make all the jerks at school piss themselves." But Lucas's eyes got big and he didn't smile when she did stuff like that. He was scared of her. It made her stomach hurt, and her eyes got wet.

When Lucas came to Mike's house and let himself downstairs, he put his backpack down and stared at her. She stared back.

"Hi," she said.

"Hey," Lucas replied.

She thought that was it, but then he opened his backpack and took out his wrist rocket.

"I'm gonna go practice in the yard, you wanna come?"

She nodded and followed him out to the front yard. She sat on the soft green lawn and watched him pick up rocks and put them in a pile. She looked around where she was sitting and found a few rocks and put them in his pile. He looked surprised and thanked her. She smiled. He started to launch the rocks, trying to hit a tree nearby; some rocks went in a straight line, some just hit the ground right away, a few got close to the tree.

"What's that for?" she asked.

"It's to fight. If we're gonna find Will, we're gonna have to fight, so we need firepower. This baby is the best slingshot ever made." He looked really proud.

"To fight the bad men?" she asked, and tried to sound brave.

"Nah, man, the the bad men are nothing, it's the Demogorgon we gotta watch out for. We gotta have a plan of attack. We gotta have backup in case your freaky powers don't work." She didn't think he meant it in a bad way.

He flung a very large rock with a lot of force. This time it hit the tree with a loud thud. She started clapping.

"Yeah!" he shouted, smiling, and started jumping around. He waved his hands in the air and started to laugh. "Yeah, that's what I'm talking about, man! Kick some monster ass just like that, Rambo style."

"What's Rambo?"

He looked at her like she said something weird and she worried he hated her again.

“Rambo is the coolest dude ever, man, he's got all these muscles and these big guns and he blows the bad guy away, like pow pow pow.” He made gun shapes with his hands as he made the noise.

Guns scared her, the guards at the center had guns. Papa had said they wouldn't hurt her, but they carried the guns when they took her from her room to the lab and back and it reminded her of being back there. She didn't tell Lucas that though, she wanted him to like her. She watched him practice for a while as he described the story of Rambo, and listening to him talk was interesting. He acted out all the scenes and did different voices, and she forgot about the center and just enjoyed the smell of the grass and the sunshine and the sound of his voice.

Before they went in for a snack, he let her try on his bandanna.

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She remembers being here before, she's in front of a building that looks familiar - did she come here with the boys? No, it was when she ran away, when Mike and Lucas had fought and she had pushed Lucas, the way Mike looked at her then, he had been scared of her for the first time. She had made Mike scared so she wanted to be away and she had come here for Eggos. The sign is dirty and torn now and the lights inside are off. The windows are cracked and smudged. She goes towards to the door and stops when a loud crunch echoes out.

She jumps and spins around; there's nothing there, is there? Is it the monster? She can barely see through the dark and the mist. But she killed it, the monster had shattered into pieces, she had felt it come apart. She had felt like she was coming apart. If the monster comes back, can she fight it again? Does she have any power left? She remembers Lucas and his wrist launcher and wishes she had a weapon. She doesn't like guns but she wouldn't mind a gun right now, a big one like Lucas said that Rambo used. She wishes she had Lucas's bandanna too, she thinks that bandanna could make anyone feel brave. She keeps walking and hopes she doesn't have to fight, but if she does, she hopes that means she can get out of here afterwards.

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She continues to walk for what seems like hours, but what may have been days, until she stops walking mid-step. This is another place she recognizes. She had walked and walked until the town buildings disappeared and there was only a long road surrounded by woods and fields. She doesn't know where she's going, she just follows the road until she sees a dirt path, by then she's bored of the road and starts to follow the path, surrounded by power lines. And in the distance is a small, short house, not covered in plants and dirt like the building back in town.

This is Will's house, she realizes. Is Will still here? Maybe she's not alone after all. She feels excited for moment, then her chest starts to hurt as she thinks it - no, that's bad. Will doesn't belong here. Mike and the others tried so hard to find him, did he get out? Did he leave when she came? Is that how it works? If the upside down works like that, maybe it's OK that she's here, if Will escaped. Maybe she belongs here, maybe she always belonged here.

She looks again at the house and it's dark out, it's always dark and the lights everywhere are always off, but the light in the window of the house is on. She starts to run. She gets to the door and she doesn't knock. She opens the door. A light down the hallway is on but everything else is dark. The living room is empty and so is the kitchen. She hears a noise, it sounds like a person coughing, her legs are shaking but she tiptoes down the hall. She hears the noise again - it sounds like a sick person. She wants to call Will's name but she's scared because what if it's the monster, what if it's a trick? What if he's like Barb? Gone?

She takes a deep breath. Can she fight right now? Killing the monster made her weak but she's been here a while, the upside down may give her strength, increase her powers. Then she thinks of Mike and Lucas and Dustin, of the way they tried to fight the monster at the school to protect her. She has to be brave. She pushes the door open and braces herself.

The room is mostly dark, but there's a light on by the bed. Will is in the bed, he's rolling around and coughing, but it looks like he's not awake. He coughs again and makes a moaning sound. He's having a nightmare. She had nightmares at the center and sometimes at Mike's house. But at Mike's house, when she woke up afterward, Mike would

hug her and tell her not to be scared, that she was safe. Papa never told her that.

She walks quietly to Will's bedside. This close, she can see he is sweating and his face is white, he looks really sick and weak like he looked when she first found him in Castle Byers and told him to hold on. She starts to shake him and calls his name, she's relieved that her hands don't go right through him like a ghost, that must mean something good.

"Will, wake up, Will, can you hear me?"

Will starts to open his eyes and her stomach flips and her eyes get fuzzy, and suddenly the room gets lighter before everything goes dark and she hears a pop and the sound of glass breaking, she looks around and the lamp by Will's bed has broken, but there's something else that's different about the room. The walls look different, cleaner and more solid, she can see shadows on the walls and she sees the moon out the window. The moon - the moon hadn't been there before. She looks at Will, his eyes are open and he's staring at her. He sits up in bed suddenly.

"Eleven, is that you? How are you here?" He looks confused and then happy. He smiles at her and she smiles back automatically. Mike taught her that was what you did when someone smiled, it was how you made friends. She wonders if Will will like her.

"I don't know, I was in the upside down and I walked for so long, and then I found your house."

He looks confused before stuttering, "But Mike and the guys said you blew up, you killed the Demogorgon and you disappeared. You saved them. Dustin said it was awesome, like a Jedi, like Obi-Wan!"

Her stomach flips again but it's a happy flip. The boys told him about her? She tries to remember what a Jedi is, a movie, something about stars? The boys had been really excited to show her it.

"How are you here?" she asks him.

"When I came back, I think something went wrong. I came back

wrong, I feel sick sometimes, and I see things, everything gets dark and freaky like I'm back in that place, the guys called it the upside down?" She nods.

Will is about to say something more when there's a noise in the hallway behind them. She's turning around and throwing her arm up to shield Will before she hears the voice.

"Will, what the hell?"

It's Will's mom, she's in a blue nightgown and she has a baseball bat in her hand. She immediately calms as she remembers how Will's mom helped her in the bath, telling her it was going to be OK and that she was safe. She wonders if all adults are supposed to make you feel safe. If Will's mom is here, everything will be OK.

"Eleven?" she asks, confused, and she drops the bat and runs to her and gives her a hug like she hugged her in the bath and she thinks Will is lucky that he gets those hugs all the time.

She and Will start to talk over each other, trying to explain what happened and how she got here but neither of them really knows. Will's mom just sits on the bed between them and pats their heads and sighs. She says it's late and they'll talk about it in the morning.

She wakes up Will's brother to set up a cot next to Will's bed and tells them to get some rest. She wants to ask Will about the boys, and she can tell he wants to ask her where she's been and what happened while he was gone, but she's suddenly really tired and Will looks like he's still thinking about his nightmare. When they're both in bed and everything is quiet again she looks around at Will's room and recognizes the same sort of things she remembers seeing in Mike's room, posters on the wall of monsters and robots, comics stacked on a desk, dirty socks in a basket by the door. She had heard a lot about Will from the boys but she still had so much to learn about him. She thinks she already likes him though. She closes her eyes and hopes when she wakes up, everything will still be there.

"Eleven?" she hears Will whisper in the dark.

"Yes?" She's almost asleep, she can feel it.

"Thank you," he says.

She smiles.

"That's what friends do," she replies, and then she's asleep.

Author's Note:

Title from the Journey song "Separate Ways (Worlds Apart)" which came out in 1983 which matches the setting of the show.